



ADDRESS BY
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MINISTER OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

KEY DISTRIBUTION CEREMONY

**CIPRIANI COLLEGE OF LABOUR ANC COOPERATIVE
STUDIES, VALSAYN**

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 26, 2016

Good morning everyone!

I know you all are excited to collect your keys and visit your new homes to begin the exciting process of cleaning, decorating, and furnishing those homes for the Christmas season.

I too have to attend to Political Business at the Eddie Hart ground later as we have a crucial election to win on Monday. So I'm not going to be too long, but I must take this opportunity to address certain matters in the public domain and place certain things on the record.

We can all agree that shelter is one of the most important human needs; second only to Food and Water.

It is because of this fact that the PNM took great pains to formalise a comprehensive housing policy that will provide shelter for qualified low to middle income earners in this country. We recognised back then that Government had an important role to play in the local housing sector.

And I can tell you today that this government, led by Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley has continued that tradition by maintaining the tenets of this citizen-centric housing policy, which was formalised in 2002.

As Minister of Housing and Urban Development, I am committed to ensuring that the Ministry and the HDC continue to offer Housing Solutions that are: Affordable, Accessible, and That Raises the Standard of Living and Quality of Life for all its Citizens.

So today, I want to offer my congratulations to all the recipients who will be collecting keys to their new futures!

I also wish to commend the HDC team for their efforts in assiduously processing the applicants who will be benefitting from our 1,000 home distribution drive for Christmas in the coming weeks. I certainly appreciate your hard work. We need to continue pushing harder to ensure that we meet our target.

But Ladies and Gentlemen, since my announcement that we at the HDC would be housing 1000 families by Christmas, those opposed to us, in particular, the former housing minister, Dr. Moonilal has criticised and condemned the initiative calling it an Election Ploy.

Well if housing 1000 families is an election ploy, then we at the HDC will be happily and merrily plying all the way until Christmas day and beyond.

I'm not exactly sure what Dr. Moonilal has against this administration providing 1000 families with affordable and safe shelter. We are simply doing our jobs in a season where family and goodwill is extremely important to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So I would simply say to Dr. Moonilal, just give me a chance and allow me to do the work on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and you the home owners.

You see, we in the PNM understand what owning your own home means to you, and Especially to you women out there.

Women in particular come to me all the time, describing that the allocation of an HDC home means that they and their partners could finally live in the same house under one roof as a family, where a woman can finally be a wife and a mother, and men can be better husbands and fathers.

I have been to people's homes during my walkabouts where an entire family would be living in one room with mattresses strewn all over the floor and the family's clothing packed in bags and suitcases. And paying high rents for the privilege of living in such unacceptable accommodation.

So call it what you want, Ploy or no Ploy, we are going to ensure that as many families improve their quality of life by giving them access to affordable and safe housing.

We are going to be housing families.

And Ladies and Gentlemen, that is the fundamental difference between the PNM and the UNC's performance in Housing. We are focussed on the legislative mandate of providing affordable shelter to citizens.

On the other hand, they are focussed on Contractors and providing massive contracts to contractors.

It is the reason why the UNC in the last administration spent 5.5 billion dollars to build only 3900 units, while the last PNM Administration was able to spend the same \$5.5 Billion to build an impressive 16,000 units.

And in spending 5.5 billion dollars over the period 2010-2015, why did Dr. Moonilal allow close to 1500 units to fall into disrepair?

Why did Dr. Moonilal and the UNC leave all these units unoccupied for so long, only to try to distribute them mere months before the last General Election allowing many of these homes to be vandalised? These are homes that families could have been occupying and enjoying.

But they were too focussed on contractors and giving out contracts and not on you, the home seeker.

Only Last week, in light of our economic circumstances, and our objective to alleviate the huge demand for housing, I made an announcement that new home recipients should agree to undertake minor works on their own and go into occupation without waiting on the HDC.

I also announced that the HDC would consider selling vandalised units as/is, where is.

And Let me explain further the reason behind those statements.

You see Ladies and Gentlemen, the cost of an HDC home to you is heavily subsidised by 40 to 50%. You don't pay for the development infrastructure and you pay minimally for the land. What this means is, each of you buying a home for say 500 thousand dollars from the HDC, that unit is actually worth close to 900 thousand to 1 million on the open market.

New Home owners immediately benefit from the equity realised: That is the difference between the purchase price and the real market value. So agreeing to undertake minimal repairs is really nothing compared to the wealth and benefits that an HDC home provides for its owners.

So please, do you own minor repairs. The State is already burdened financially. And for those applicants going on unit walkthroughs, please do your best to accept the units and agree to undergo the repairs as there are other applicants waiting in line who are more than willing to accept the units as they are.

As for the sale of Vandalised units, We intend to press ahead in exploring the sale of vandalised units in an as/is, where is condition. As a part of a responsible government that does not operate by Vaps, the HDC has already been instructed to come up with a formal policy and framework for the disposal of these assets to qualifying applicants.

When that policy and framework is completed, it will be taken before cabinet for its approval.

So in the very near future, I will return to the National Community with a proper and comprehensive plan for the disposal of these vandalised units so as reduce the burden on the tax payer.

I normally prefer a different type of Speech when I am addressing you, our new home-owners, but given the number of issues that were raised in the public domain, I had to use this opportunity to address them. I therefore trust that my responses have helped you to understand Government's position as it relates to housing. Your desire for homeownership is what drives our enthusiasm to deliver even more.

As I close, I congratulate you again and I urge you to take care of your new asset. You are now part of a new community and I encourage you to help develop and transform this new environment into a model HDC community. Be proud of it so that in turn, we can also be proud.

It is the season for joy, peace and goodwill. I therefore want to take this opportunity to wish you and your families the very best during this Holy Season of Christmas. May next year be a prosperous one for us all!

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen for your time and attention.

And before you leave, please make sure to visit the booths outside where suppliers are wanting to serve your home owning needs with their goods and services.